

Weather Lore – Part 2:



Photo by Herbert A. "Joe" Pase III,
Texas Forest Service, www.insectimages.org

Did you know that a katydid's song can tell the temperature?

"Wooly Worms & Bellowing Cows – Shaggy Horses & Hoot Owls" *Predicting Weather the Old-Fashioned Way*

By *Coleen Vansant*

Information Manager, Alabama Forestry Commission

For most people in today's world, weather is simply an annoyance. We don't pay much attention to a beautiful weather day, but we glue ourselves to the television to see if it will be too wet to play golf, plow the garden, or cook out — or if it will be too cold to pour concrete, go camping, or plan a fishing trip.

For thousands of years man has monitored the weather. From the beginning of mankind he has watched the skies, the seas, animals, insects, and plants for signs of changes in the weather. Where bad weather may only be an inconvenience or a topic of conversation to us today, it meant much more to generations before us. Knowing what the weather was going to do meant the difference in prosperity and poverty, comfort and discomfort, or health and sickness. For our ancestors, not knowing

what the weather would do tomorrow, next week, or the next season could mean either total success or utter failure for man and his family.

The previous segment of this story (see *Spring 2003*) dealt with how man over the centuries has depended on the heavens and other elements to predict the weather. Part two of the story will explain how animals, insects, and plants have been relied upon to indicate changes in the weather.

What the Animals Tell Us

Each year on the second day of February, the entire nation looks to the small town of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania for the results of an event that affects us for the next six weeks. Since 1886, Punxsutawney Phil, a groundhog, has come out of his winter burrow on this day to tell the nation if

spring will be early or late. If it is cloudy and Phil does not see his shadow, it will be an early spring. If it is a bright, sunny day and he does see his shadow, spring will be another six weeks away.

Although this sounds silly to many people, it is an example of how man has depended on animals to give him both a short and long range forecast of what Mother Nature is going to do. During the recent earthquake in North Alabama, many people reported bizarre behavior from their animals shortly before the quake was felt. People have also reported this same behavior from animals before a tornado. Listed below are just a few animal indicators of the weather.

It will be a bad winter if:

Squirrels accumulate large stores of nuts.

Beavers build heavier lodges than usual.

Squirrels' tails grow bushier.

Animals grow thicker fur (horses, cows, dogs, sheep, etc.)

Cows' hooves break off earlier.

Squirrels build their nests low in trees.

Animals grow a short fuzzy coat under their regular one.

Crows gather together.

Hoot owls call late in the fall.

Screech owls sound like women crying.

Rain, storms, and other bad weather are predicted:

If a cow bellows three times without stopping, rain will come a hopping.

If an owl hoots on the east side of a mountain, there will be bad weather.

Horses run fast before a violent storm or before windy conditions.

Pigs gather leaves and straw before a storm.

If the bull leads the cows to pasture, expect rain; if the cows precede the bull, the weather will be uncertain.

Expect rain and/or severe weather if dogs eat grass.

When the rooster goes crowing to bed, he will rise with a watery head.

Redbirds and bluebirds chatter when it's going to rain.

If cows in a field are lying down, rain can be expected within 12 hours.

When fish break water and bite eagerly, expect rain.

If a dog pulls his feet up high while walking, a change in the weather is coming.

If a dog starts to whine for no reason, you can expect a major storm.

Wild geese fly high in pleasant weather and fly low in bad weather.

Ducks quack loudly before a rain.

If a rooster crows at night, there will be rain by morning.

Listening to the Insects

Although insects are not always the most wanted thing around a home or yard, you may want to wait, watch, and listen before you get the fly swatter or call the bug man. For thousands of years

these creepy crawlers have been as good as weather radar for mankind.

It will be a bad winter if:

Hornets and yellow jackets build their nests heavier and closer to the ground than usual.

There are a lot of spiders, frost worms, and black bugs about.

Crickets are in the chimney.

It will be a long harsh winter if wasps build their nests high.

If ant hills are high in July, winter will be snowy.

Three months after the first katydid begins "hollerin'," the first killing frost will come.

When butterflies gather in bunches in the air, winter is coming soon. If they migrate early, winter will be early.

If ducks or drakes their wings do flutter high
Or tender colts upon their backs do lie,
If sheep do bleat, or play, or skip about,
Or swine hide straw by bearing on their snout,
If oxen lick themselves against the hair,
Or grazing kine to feed apace appear,
If cattle bellow, grazing from below,
Or if dogs' entrails rumble to and fro,
If doves or pigeons in the evening come
Later than usual to their dove-house home,
If crows and daws do oft themselves be-wet,
Or ants and pismires home a-pace do get,
If in the dust hens do their pinions shake,
Or by their flocking a great number make,
If swallows fly upon the water low,
Or wood lice seem in armies for to go,
If flies or gnats, or fleas infest and bite,
Or sting more than they're wont by day or night,
If toads hie home, or frogs do croak amain,
Or peacocks cry,
Soon after look for rain!

— Author Unknown
(but sounds a wee bit Gaelic)

The woolly worm has many stories to tell about the weather:

It's going to be a bad winter if there are a lot of them crawling about; if he has a heavy coat; or if the black band on his back is wide.

If he's black in front, the bad weather is to come; if he's black behind, the worst weather is past.

If he's brown at both ends and orange in the middle, the winter will be mild.

Other insect-related weather predictions:

Locusts sing when the air is hot and dry.

Crickets chirping loudly indicate a pleasant day to follow.

Spiders will spin thicker, bigger webs when the weather is going to be dry.

Ants are busy, gnats bite, crickets sing louder than usual, spiders come down from their webs, and flies gather in houses just before rain and possible severe storms.

Learning from the Plants

Although much of our food and fiber is derived from plant material, our ancestors were particularly dependent upon the local foliage. Both domestic and wild plants gave them food, shelter, medicines, tools, and transportation, as well as being a very important weather indicator.

It will be a bad winter if:

Blackberry blooms are especially heavy.

Carrots grow deeper in the ground.

Grapes, cockle burrs, and apples mature early.

Sweet potatoes have a tougher skin.

Onions grow thicker layers.

Trees are laden with green leaves late in the fall.

Hickory nuts have a heavy shell.

There's a heavy crop of berries, acorns, and pinecones.

Bark on trees is thicker and heavier on the north side.

Leaves shed before they turn.

Moss grows heavy on trees.

Corn shucks and silk grow thicker, and the shucks grow tighter.

The darker green the grass is during the summer, the harder the winter.

If fruit trees bloom in the fall, the weather will be severe the following winter.

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Predicting Weather the Old-Fashioned Way

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The following plant lore predicts impending rain:

Flowers close their petals up.

Sap from the maple tree flows faster.

The daisy shuts its eye.

Flowers smell more fragrant.

The milkweed closes its pod before a rain.

The pitcher plant opens wider before a rain. ☼

Resources:

<http://www.reearthing.com/newpage2.htm>

http://wv.essortment.com/weatherfolklore_ruao.htm

http://members.aol.com/Accustiver/wxworld_folk.html

<http://www.meds-sdmm.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/cmos/weatherlore.html>

<http://www.wrgb.com/wx/research/research.asp?Selection=folklore>

http://ashevillelist.com/weather_folk_sayings.htm

http://www.carolina.com/earth/weather_folklore.asp?print=yes

<http://www.stormfax.com/wxfolk.htm>

<http://ncnatural.com/wildflwr/fall/folklore.html>

<http://www.chestnut-sw.com/lore.htm>

<http://www.stalkingthewild.com/weather.htm>

The Foxfire Book, Anchor Books, 1972, New York

Weather Experiments You Can Try On Your Own!

Rhododendrons have the unique ability to act as temperature gauges. As the air temperature rises, their leaves begin to unfurl.

•At 60°F and above, the leaves are fully open.

•At 40°F, the leaves are about one quarter closed.

•At 30°F, the leaves are about half closed.

•At 20°F or below, the leaves are completely closed.

You can determine the temperature by counting the chirps of a cricket. Count the number of times a cricket chirps in 14 seconds. That number plus 40 will give you the temperature in Fahrenheit to within one degree. Example: 20 chirps + 40 = 60°F.

Or, count a cricket's chirps for one minute, add 100, then divide the total by 4. The result will give you a rough idea of the temperature. Example: 200 chirps + 100 / 4 = 75°F.

Put a pine cone outside where you can observe it. Watch how it changes when the humidity increases. It will close up in moist weather to protect the seeds.

A katydid's song gives the following temperatures:

"Kay-tee—did it" 78°F

"Kay-tee—didn't" 74°F

"Kay-tee—did" 70°F

"Kate—didn't" 66°F

"Kate-tee" 62°F

"Kate" 58°F.



Photo by Coleen Vansant

Many people say that animals exhibit bizarre behavior just before an earthquake or storm.